



THE BOOK

By Greg Unger

The moldering tomes of forbidden knowledge and sorcery found by investigators are without a doubt one of the greatest prizes to be had in Call of Cthulhu. Below is a scenario based on the discovery of The Revelations of Glaaki. The keeper can substitute any other book title, if desired. This mystery works best if it is integrated with a campaign or a more fast-paced scenario; this gives the investigators an ongoing sub-mystery which may or may not prove relevant to their current investigations.

The investigators have discovered an unusual, brass-bound, ornate, locked book of unknown origin. The pages of the book are not visible, as the cover is completely enclosing. It is the

keeper's prerogative as to whether a title, English or otherwise, is inscribed on the book. A locksmith will determine the existence of tiny filaments woven through the tumblers, making the locksmith hesitate. A Biology roll on the part of the locksmith equates these to trigger-hairs such as those found on carnivorous plants like the Venus' flytrap. Biology is at one-half for anyone not making the Locksmith roll to reach the same conclusion. The locksmith may proceed to pick the lock at this point; no further rolls are called for. However, anyone present who makes an Idea roll will put forward the concept that the book is trapped in some way, to be triggered by anyone picking the lock.

There are few ways of examining the book in depth. Taking the book apart at the seams will probably set off the trap by default. X-ray machines are uncommon in the '20s, but a well-established doctor late in the decade might have access to one. The trigger-hairs will not show up on X-ray photographs, but several vials are seen to be embedded in the casing and binding. These might theoretically contain chemicals of some kind—perhaps explosives or acid, designed to destroy the book's contents or kill the opener. A Knowledge roll at x2 can make an analogy between this and certain obscure Oriental puzzle-boxes, which were designed to store both rare treasure and a grenade—which would explode were the correct technique not employed in opening the box.

Investigators with access to 1990s technology can determine that the vials contain conflagratory chemicals released by the reaction of trigger-hairs to, apparently, any opening of the book. There are even a multitude of these triggers embedded in the cover and binding itself; opening the book by brute force is no solution, either.

The book was written in the fifth century by Chinese scholars, who recorded what they learned of Glaaki and the Cthulhu Mythos from their journeys to Polynesia. The book experienced many change of hands (the actual journey can be pieced together by clues 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14 below) before arriving in the hands of the investigators. It contains an ingenious (perhaps nonterran) pressure- and tamper-sen-

sitive mechanism which destroys the book's contents if the book is opened incorrectly. The key can be simulated by an expert locksmith. However, the book can still only be safely opened when in a low-pressure environment, equivalent to 18,000 feet above sea-level or higher (hence clues 16 through 18). This desensitizes the trigger-hairs, disconnecting the destruct mechanism. In the 1920s, no plane existed which could fly that high, but such heights had and could be climbed.

The book contains a sheaf of tightly packed, brittle parchments. These have been written on each side of each page. Fortunately, these parchments were penned for reading to an emperor, so they are not cryptic or as incomplete as one would suspect a 1500-year-old book to be.

ADDITIONS

The book is in excellent condition, and many museums and libraries would be very anxious to get ahold of it. The more professionals and institutes contacted by the investigators with regards to this book, the greater the chance that one or more such institutes or collectors will offer to purchase the book. Exorbitant amounts might eventually be quoted by eccentric dilettantes; failing this, some museums might even resort to criminal activities to acquire such a priceless treasure. The keeper can expand on this as desired, including curious black-marketeers, cat-burglars, and ruthless art and curio dealers.

Were the book's contents to reach a major institute of learning, the presumed knowledge of Polynesian and Indo-Chinese myths and culture would be seriously expanded; mankind would thus creep ever closer to the mind-shattering revelations of the Cthulhu and Glaaki myth-cycles.

CLUES

The PCs can attain the following clues throughout their investigation. The sources of each specific clue are detailed under the Acquiring Clues section, below.

1. The book is definitely Chinese in origin—bronze was used by Oriental cultures earlier than any Middle East or Western nation.

2. Such books were written between 450 and 515 AD.

3. There may be many such books, each with a different solution.

4. Reference to the "Gordian Knot" myth: Alexander came upon an intricately knotted rope in his conquest of the Middle East. It was presented to him

by a Chinese scholar and was fabled to unlock great secrets if opened. Alexander failed to solve the puzzle and cut the knot with his sword in fury. A possibly related article explains that Alexander of Macedon fell into a state of depression after failing his quest of knowledge—an ancient locked book bound in brass and foreign in origin was destroyed in its opening.

5. Each book needs a key to be opened.

6. Keys to temples and cases (and possibly books?) were kept around the neck of a high priest or monk in many Eastern religions. Taoist monks wore keys to their most sacred writings.

7. The books were prolific and were burned on the orders of Emperor Vang in A.D. 550. Scribes copied the manuscripts (a Library Use roll shows that the manuscripts were originally copied from stone tablets), then later locks were forged so only the emperor and the scribes could use them.

8. The books originally went to monastery vaults in distant Nepal after the fall of Emperor Vang.

9. The books were taken by the monks to escape persecution, and travelled to India, then to the Middle East (in a pilgrimage).

10. The Ottoman Empire swallowed up the Middle East in the 14th-15th centuries. Many books were destroyed or scattered with the disruption of monasteries. Moslems imported relics, and they adopted techniques of embalming, even to the extent of importing corpses.

11. Great disturbances involving foreign cults from the East (either India or the Afghan/Kazakh area). Many tombs were desecrated and looted in Turkey between 1810 and 1822.

12. Turkey previously possessed Greece, but Greece gained independence in 1833.

13. The books probably originate from China or the south Pacific. Chinese scribes ventured to Polynesia—which may explain many cults' origins from and references to that area.

14. The high priest of said cult was reputedly buried in eastern Turkey in the early 1800s in an old city-fort. The cults often holed up in such places.

15. "Such knots may only be safely opened at the full height of Mount Ximvane." An Idea roll translates "knots" into "books."

16. A translational quirk altered the proper pronunciation of "Dimvane" to "Ximvane." "Dimvane" translates to "Demavend."

17. Mount Demavend is located in central-east China, north of the Himalayas.

18. The old Athens Library burned down in A.D. 625.

19. The new Athens Library was built on the ruins of the old.

1 Greek Seal found on book binding

20. Some cults hid out in old, abandoned city-forts. A History roll yields these facts: Such forts were built in early Greek history. These forts ruled over neighboring mud-hut villages. Many forts were built on islands, while others were built near the Pindus Mountains.

ACQUIRING CLUES

What follows are the various sources from which the PCs can attain the specific clues listed above. The clues attainable (with the right questioning, obviously) are listed as numbers beside each heading. The keeper is encouraged to add more clues and clue locations, as consistent with the setting or campaign storyline.

College Professor (1, 5, 13, and maybe 11 and 20): This professor can be an acquaintance of the investigators or may be recommended by library authorities as an expert in archaeology and anthropology. He can be convinced to examine the book as a favor by good roleplaying or Persuade rolls. If bribed, he will certainly examine the book, but will become suspicious and may later discuss his findings with an institute he is associated with, perhaps giving rise to the events described in Additions to this Scenario, above.

If cults are mentioned, add 11 and 20 to the attainable clues.

(Professor's College) Library (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18): This can either be the library associated with the college professor, above, or else any major American or British library.

British/American Museums (1, 5, 11)

Athenian Scribes (1, 11, and maybe 20): These are assumed to be working in the Athens Library. They might be contacted independently or recommended by an acquaintance familiar with Greece. They speak no English. A successful Persuade roll yields clue 20.

Athens Library (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 17, 18): This is the largest such institute in the city and is the focus for the nation's scholars.

Athens College Library (4, 10, 11): This is the center of learning for the nation.

Athenian Authorities (12, 19): These include public record archives and government offices. Making use of these all require Greek rolls.

Local History (Athens) (12, 14, 18, 19): These clues can be acquired by virtue of History rolls.

Scroll/Other Papers (13, 15): These

can be found in the ruins of the old Athens Library. The clues require Greek rolls to be read. If only one Greek roll is made, clue 15 should be the one that is understood.

BENEATH ATHENS LIBRARY

The dark cellars beneath the library are accessible by way of the old, grumpy librarian (this requires a Fast Talk or Persuade in Greek); through the college professor speaking on the investigators' behalf; or, failing those, by breaking and entering. The door to the cellar is large and is kept padlocked at all times.

The cellar is a chilly, unlit, disused jumble of hewn stone halls, crumbling rooms and cracked flagstones. Spot Hidden rolls in various rooms will turn up nothing but animal bones and shattered glass. In a room at the end of the hall, where the floor has not yet cracked, a Listen roll reveals a continuous drip-drip coming from the corner. Investigation reveals the cause as a cracked pipe in the ceiling. Since the smooth floor is not cracked, why doesn't the water fill the room to some degree? Sure enough, the water is actually leaking into space below the cellar: namely, the old Athens Library. A look around the room reveals that the stones in one section of the walls are loose and crumbling inward. A few good kicks can send most of the rubble tumbling down a rocky incline beyond the wall.

This is actually an ancient marble stairway, which can be followed down into the crushed and claustrophobic ruins of the old library—a thick stone tangle of fractured pillars and collapsing archways crouching over stained and buckling marble, with sprinkled remains of sculptures and books disintegrating in the dusty puddles. A search of the accessible sections will turn up several withered parchments unreached by water, including a fat scroll partially pinned by a SIZ 45 pillar. Keepers should play up the realization that nobody has been down here for over 1000 years; at any moment, the entire mass, settling slowly for centuries, could be unbalanced by this intrusion and lurch down onto the intruders, crushing or pinning them.

Investigators may notice a skeleton pinned from the waist up under several tons of rock. This corpse was actually that of an assassinated scholar who had planned to burn the manuscripts relating to the book.

CITY-FORT

The old city-forts in the Pindus Moun-

tains in Greece have been around for as long as anyone can remember. A few venerable old Greek men living in the villages outlying Athens still remember stories of dark sects and their unholy rites, of secret pilgrimages of the dead, and the strange, alien peoples from the Far East and India, who brought with them the bound corpses of their priests and hid them in the decrepit forts. Showing these men the book brings a collective gasp of horror, and they speak in hushed tones that there are reasons—which they will not discuss—why such books were given such locks.

Any competent guide scoffs at such superstition and can quickly locate the city-forts closest to Athens for paying customers. Walking there will take a full day, but transport by horseback or truck can be purchased, cutting the travel time to two or four hours, respectively. The Pindus Mountains are covered with scrub and provide challenging and twisting trails (hence the advantage of horses).

One of the forts—a decaying, moss-covered stone affair overgrown with tough scrub, built on the side of a mountain—sports an archway fronting a passage that has been chopped out of the mountain. Considerable brickwork near and around the arch have been laid to rubble by the knotted shrub that has diligently worked its roots through the fort's wall over the decades. An Idea roll spawns the thought that this entrance was formerly bricked up.

CRYPT

Beyond the archway, the short tunnel angles awkwardly into a ragged, very crude stairway. This unexpectedly ends at a large, black, iron-banded door filling the entire passage. The door is STR 18 ? to be opened. Unwitting investigators who push the door wider than needed to get through will realize, belatedly, that it had been supporting part of the decaying ceiling, at the cost of 2D6 HP; those making a Luck roll think to look up in time enough to move mostly out of the way, losing only 1D3 HP.

Beyond the door is what looks like a low-ceilinged natural cavern partitioned by mud-bricked walls. The layout is rather simple, if chaotic, so that a person making his way forward comes out into a large open area containing another arch. Anyone wandering around, however, finds the brickwork to be a veritable maze, which periodically fuses with natural channels and caves in the rocks which lead further into the mountain. If a few moronic investigators stalk off into this maze, allow them each a

Track roll to return once they quit exploring. Failure means they are hopelessly lost in the natural cave system and will wander into a large natural cavern in 1D4+1 days. This cavern contains a 15-foot, rectangular, black, stone arch set in one wall. Geology rolls confirm the stone as basalt. Archaeology rolls indicate the architecture to be unlike anything known. Astronomy rolls recognize what appear to be faint carvings on the arch to be star charts. A light breeze goes inward through the arch. Twenty yards in is a large impression like a one-toed print. Zoology rolls prove this to be of no known creature. Cthulhu Mythos rolls convince the hapless investigators to turn tail and run before they get 100 yards in.

Anyone *not* getting lost (i.e., they go forward, as above) will be able to continue through the low cavern and into a naturally narrow and vaulting chamber within which are two large stone sarcophagi. The first is empty, but the second contains a mummified "corpse." This is in fact a hibernating Servant of Glaaki, but it is much too far away from Polynesia and much too rotted to move anymore. If its flesh is exposed to sunlight, the Green Rot will run rampant through it, destroying it hideously within hours. However, if it is ever taken 2000 yards or more above sea level, it will make contact with Glaaki and rise to kill

again. (Keepers should have some fun if the thing is airlifted back to the U.S.)

On the far side of the chamber, a dangerously steep and cramped, but short, passage winds into a third chamber, which is apparently a deserted shrine of some sort, replete with crumbling candles, torch holders, and what appears to be the body of a shrouded warrior monk desiccating away on a low stone table. There is a strong, strange smell here. (A Knowledge roll identifies this as embalming fluids.) The corpse is clutching a carved wooden scepter. Anyone examining the scepter notices that one end is pointed and deeply stained. One guess as to with what. Anyone daring to look under the shroud will see that the corpse wears a tiny key around its neck. The chain is fairly strong, is not long enough to pull over the corpse's head and has rusted shut. To free the key, the investigators must either rip this STR 9 chain or else pull it off through the corpse's head (0/1 SAN loss).

SCEPTER

This length of teakwood has been carved, and a smooth piece of obsidian is inset at one end, while the other end has been sharpened to a blood-stained point.

The scepter is in fact enchanted; anyone with at least 1% Cthulhu Mythos

is allowed to attempt to roll his POW or less on 1D100 to realize this. The staff currently has 6 Magic Points stored in it, and these are involuntarily expended when spellcasting, before its wielder's MPs are drained. If the scepter is used to kill someone or something by stabbing it through the head or throat with the pointed end, all Magic Points possessed by the victim are absorbed into the scepter. If the scepter is broken, or the obsidian tampered with, the scepter becomes permanently inactive. Ω

WHEN THE VIRUS INFECTS
HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES...



THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

DARK CONSPIRACY™

GDW: 2109

GDW

P.O. Box 1646
Bloomington, IL
61702-1646

KIRK
WESCOM

Challenge 72 75